

House of haunted memories

Former Rochester man writes about difficult childhood

By Andrew Owens
aowens@postbulletin.com
(507) 285-7624

Luke Sullivan has dark memories from his childhood home in southwest Rochester. Not because it is a 30-room structure tucked away on a remote hill, but because he, along with his five brothers and mother, faced the alcohol-induced rage and fury of his father there.

Now, a half-century later, Sullivan is releasing a book that describes just how much of a scarring experience it was. Sullivan, who works for an advertising firm in Austin, Texas, began research for “Thirty Rooms to Hide In” about 18 years ago. He started writing 12 years ago.

“I started researching it when my first son was born so I would be able to give him something about my life,” he says.

The book, which Sullivan describes as “The Shining,” but funnier,” tells the story of Sullivan’s father, Roger Sullivan, who developed a drinking problem in 1958 that haunted him until his death eight years later. Alcoholism led Roger to torment his family verbally and emotionally, leading to a downward spiral in his career as a respected orthopedic surgeon at Mayo Clinic.

“There was no term for alcoholics then; the term wasn’t created until 1966, the year he died,” Sullivan says. “There’s



L. Sullivan

no way my mother could have done anything about it. He was allowed to go insane without anyone saying, ‘What are you doing to these people?’”

Eventually, Roger started showing up to work with the smell of alcohol on his breath and hands that shook when he was supposed to perform operations. The clinic stepped in.

“They threatened to kick him out, but they gave him some help at the Hartford Institute of Living, which was the best place at the time,” Sullivan says. “It was a structured three months, and he returned home in 1965 with a semblance of sanity.”

Sullivan says that his father “fell off the wagon” shortly afterward, and incurred more problems at work because of his alcoholism. The clinic removed him from his position until Tony Bianco, a fellow orthopedic surgeon and friend, went to the clinic’s

board of directors to vouch for Roger. The board was persuaded to reinstate him, but he died that same day in Georgia, not knowing he had been given another chance.

“The clinic was very understanding and was a very good place for him,” Sullivan says. “But it wasn’t enough to save him.”

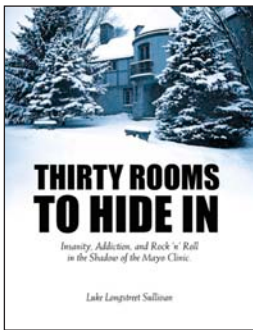
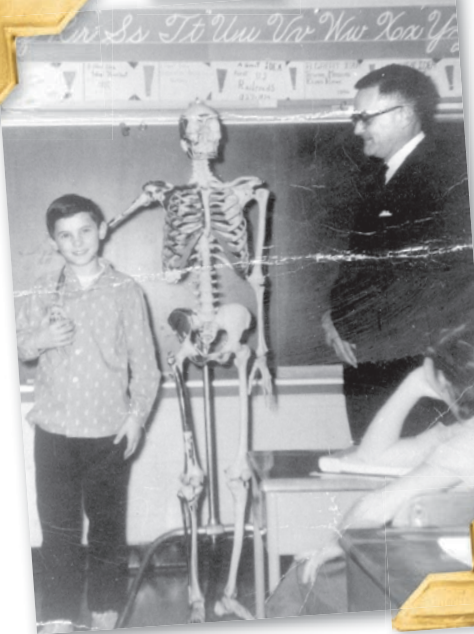
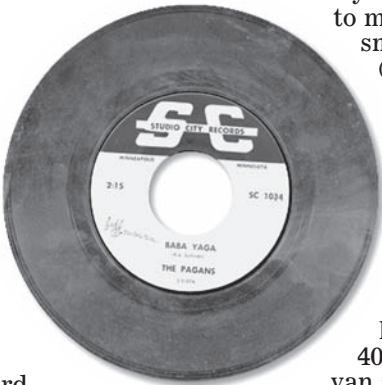
Sullivan says the book, the bulk of which is comprised of correspondence between his mother and maternal grandfather during those years, has elements of comedy throughout the story from the opening chapter.

He credits his mother with keeping the family together during those difficult years.

“My mother was able to move us into a smaller house (after Roger’s death) and raise us into six fairly normal kids, and that’s all to her credit,” Sullivan says.

Despite leaving the house more than 40 years ago, Sullivan says it still has an effect on himself and his brothers.

“I’ve been back many times,” he says. “All of us, the brothers, are really drawn to the house. It has a magnetic draw on us.”



Buy the book

“Thirty Rooms to Hide In” is available in electronic form on Amazon.com, Nook by Barnes and Noble, and iTunes for \$9.99. A print version can be purchased at blurb.com for \$11.95.

On the Web

Luke Sullivan’s website, www.thirtyroomstohidein.com, features a handful of home videos from chapters in the book; picture albums with photos from as early as the 1930s through 2009; audio clips of tracks from his brothers’ rock-and-roll band, The Pagans, from 1965, and handwritten letters, diaries, psychiatric and police reports, and medical records, from throughout his childhood.

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Tweet of the week

<< I saw some footage of some polar bears drinking water today. It’s obviously fake. Everybody knows they only drink Coca-Cola. >> @ThaRealMisfit

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Smarty pants

The National Assessment of Educational Progress results released showed only 12 percent of high school seniors demonstrated proficiency in history. Think you’re smarter? Try a sampling of the test. — *Mike Dougherty*

<http://tinyurl.com/3cegub8>

For more great clicks, check out Digital Mike on Page F2.

Video of the week

Add a little “Mission: Impossible” theme music, and most any feat becomes an adventure. In this week’s clip, one little squirrel proves he’ll do just about anything for a snack. Looks like James Bond has some new competition! — *Marissa Block*

<http://tinyurl.com/42x92v2>

App of the week

Time tracker

The U.S. Department of Labor recently released a new smartphone app to allow workers to track their hours and calculate their wages themselves.

The free **DOL-Timesheet** app for the iPhone and iPod Touch also keeps track of lunch and other breaks, and it features an overtime calculator

and comment space for notes.

The Department of Labor is working on making the app available to Android and BlackBerry users, as well as new features to allow workers to track tips, commissions, bonuses, holiday and weekend pay, and shift differentials. — *Marissa Block*



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The Fillmore Art Walk is set for July 1. Details on the **Center Stage blog**.

◀ “Mr. Popper’s Penguins” features wit, charm and humor. Watch the trailer on the **Center Stage blog**.

The American Cancer Society this week urged Minnesota legislators to add \$1.50 to the cigarette tax. Details on the **Pulse on Health blog**.